

200 unionists picket outside Parliament
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By Abdul Rahim Sabri

Some 200 union activists led by the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) picketed in front of Parliament House today in protest against amendments proposed for the Employment Act 1955.

NONEThey said the proposed amendments were not in the interests of workers and the government had failed to engage trade unions before moving forward with the changes.

The picket began at 10.55am with the trade union officers and members carrying banners demanding Human Resources Minister Dr S Subramaniam to withdraw the proposed amendments, which they said would jeopardise workers' rights.

Forming a column at the entrance to Parliament House, they chanted, "Withdraw employment law changes" and "Long live MTUC".

Several other groups were also present to show their support, among them employees of carmaker Perodua and the National Union of Bank Employees (NUBE), under the watchful eyes of some 50 police officers.

NONEThe crowd had a sing-along of workers' songs, among them Barisan Union, NUBE Berjaya and The Voice of Unity, Strength and Justice, accompanied by the sound of the kompang (Malay hand drums).

Speaking to reporters during the picket, MTUC president Khalid Atan (speaking into loud hailer) said he had met with the minister, Subramaniam, and a few employers a short while earlier to submit their letter opposing the amendments.

"We want negotiations to continue after this," said Khalid, who also appealed to Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to intervene in the matter.

He said he was informed that the amendments would not be tabled this week and MTUC would take a "wait and see" approach.

"We don't want to speculate anything, we will discuss about this later (if the government tables the amendment in Parliament)."

The picket concluded at 11.35am without any untoward incident.

The amendments are expected to liberalise rules for employing workers but opponents argue that this would erode workers' rights